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ABSTRACT

To explore themes previously identified among successful schools from the perspective of the school district, this report organizes its discussion of the nine themes developed by T.B. Corcoran and B.L. Wilson (1986) around the role of the central office administration and the ways in which it might cooperate with schools in supporting secondary school improvement. The themes, which emerged from Corcoran and Wilson's study of 571 schools included in the Secondary School Recognition Program, are presented to reflect the writers' interpretations. Anecdotes from interviews with selected central office staff and secondary school principals are included in discussions of the themes, as well as supplemental analysis. The themes, which portrayed the dynamics of successful schools, were derived from data on school characteristics, reports by site visitors, and reports by the schools on the factors contributing to their success. The nine themes defined and reviewed are as follows: (1) clear goals and core values; (2) leadership: (3) control and discretion; (4) solving problems and improving schools; (5) recognition and rewards for teaching; (6) high expectations and recognition of achievement; (7) student-teacher relationships; (8) school-community relations; and (9) good people and a good environment. The report offers concluding remarks with suggestions for decision-makers contemplating their district's role. Over 70 references are appended. (CJH)

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SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND THE CENTRAL OFFICE: PARTNERS FOR IMPROVEMENT

by

Rima Miller
Barbara Smey-Richman
Michele Woods-Houston

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Rima Miller
Barbara Smey-Richman
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Research for Better Schools, Inc.
444 North Third Street
Philadelphia, PA 19123-4107

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Word Processor .....Francena Shelkin

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INTRODUCTION

Secondary schools tend to be physically big, complex organizations with large student bodies and faculties. They have broad curricula, multi-layered goals, and a diversity of expected outcomes. In addition, they have several administrative layers, including the principal, vice principals, and department heads. Secondary teachers define themselves as content specialists and are organized in a departmental structure. Parents tend to be less involved and, to some extent, less influential. Secondary students are not as influenced by authority as they are by their peers and by social and environmental conditions that shape their views of the relevancy of their schooling process (Firestone, Rosenblum, & Webb, 1987).

Due to these complexities, change at the secondary level is particularly complicated. Yet, in spite of the complications, some schools are successfully addressing secondary school improvement. These schools, which exemplify the true story of reform, can be found "in communities all across the land in which parents, teachers, administrators, students, and civic leaders are working together to create and preserve unusually successful schools" (Corcoran & Wilson, 1986, p. 1).

These successful secondary schools are models of what is possible in public education. In these schools, staffs have pride and confidence in their work. Ineffective teaching is unacceptable. Governance of the schools is shared by the principal and faculty. And staffs and students alike feel that they are the best! These schools are part of the United States Department of Education's Secondary School Recognition Program and are deemed successful because of their "outstanding achievement in establishing and maintaining exemplary programs, policies, and practices" (Corcoran & Wilson, 1986, p. ix).

Successful schools are usually described in school-based terms, with little attention paid to the district organization of which they are a part. The role of central office administrators in implementing school change is not a widely studied area (Fullan, 1985). This lack of information leaves many questions unanswered about the district's role in secondary school improvement. It is the purpose of this paper to explore the district's relationship to secondary schools engaged in improvement activities. In a series of discussions, this paper addresses two critical questions affecting secondary school improvement:

- What is the role of central office administration in developing and maintaining successful schools?
- How should central office administration carry out their role in supporting secondary school improvement?

This paper is organized around nine themes developed by Corcoran and Wilson (1986) as they studied the 571 schools included in the Secondary School Recognition Program. The themes, which characterized the dynamics

of these successful schools, were generated from "... data on school characteristics, reports by site visitors, and self-reports by the schools on factors contributing to success" (Corcoran & Wilson, 1986, p. 35). The nine themes described in the Corcoran and Wilson study are:

- clear goals and core values -- a sense of shared purpose, goals, and priorities among students, faculty, parents, and the community
- leadership in action -- dynamic, powerful leaders who recognize people's strengths and allow them to maximize their skills
- control and discretion -- the balance of loose-tight controls that contribute to overall school success
- good people and a good environment -- high degrees of collegiality and teacher professionalism as well as a safe and comfortable physical environment
- recognition and rewards for teaching -- appreciation and acknowledgment for accomplishments and efforts
- positive student-teacher relationships -- an environment where students and faculty work together to achieve shared goals
- high expectations and recognition of achievement -- creating learning opportunities for all students and acknowledging their accomplishments
- solving problems and improving the schools -- assuming a "can do" attitude and treating problems as challenges that can be overcome
- working in the community -- positive interactions with the community that generate good school-community relations.

In this paper, these themes are defined and reviewed from a district point of view. They are presented in a different order to reflect the writers' interpretations.* In some cases, the labels have been changed. Anecdotes from interviews* with selected central office staffs and secondary school principals are included in theme discussions to supplement the limited literature. Additional discussions are provided by Research for

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* Interviewees were selected from three school districts (Newark, NJ; Pittsburgh, PA; and Washington, DC) that participate in the RBS Mid-Atlantic Metropolitan Council.

Better Schools, Inc. personnel who have extensive experience as developers and implementors of secondary school programs. Following discussion of the themes, concluding remarks are presented with suggestions for decision makers contemplating the district's role.

Several recent studies have presented characteristics of successful schools, especially the Corcoran and Wilson (1986) report upon which this paper is based. The objective here is to: (1) explore these themes from the district's perspective, (2) generate discussion concerning the central office's role, and (3) provide suggestions as to how districts and schools might work together to develop and maintain the characteristics of a successful school.

NINE THEMES FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FROM A DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

It is becoming increasingly clear, as secondary schools and districts struggle to improve, that developing partnerships and working together to achieve school excellence is the most logical approach to secondary school improvement. The following sections support that conclusion. Each section includes an introduction to one of the nine themes that are the framework for this paper, and a review of the literature and preliminary discussion of the district's role. The discussions do not provide all of the answers; instead, they may raise more questions. The intent is to provoke further discussion as to how districts might share in creating the positive conditions needed to be a truly successful school.

Clear Goals and Core Values

A basic characteristic of successful secondary schools is a sense of shared purpose among the faculty, students, parents, and community (California State Department of Education, 1984; Corcoran, 1985; Corcoran & Wilson, 1986; Lipsitz, 1984). The consensus concerning shared purpose is focused primarily on academic achievement, which serves as the foundation upon which the school community works together. In their study of successful secondary schools included in the U.S. Department of Education's recognition program, Corcoran and Wilson (1986) found that:

> In most cases, the written statement of goals prepared by these schools are no different than those found in most schools; they are full of the same abstract platitudes and educational ideals. What is different is that these statements are taken seriously and are translated into actions that affect the day-to-day activities. (p. 53)

In successful secondary schools, policy makers and administrators actively strive to make the goals come alive. Their strategies include informing everyone about the goals, monitoring progress toward the goals, and using data and input from multiple sources to constantly refine and redefine the goals (Corcoran & Wilson, 1986).

Why are goals so important to the success of secondary schools? Basically, goals play the critical role of establishing a clear vision or a sense of direction for the school community. By articulating a set of goals, the schools are setting priorities which, in turn, establish their unique identity and strengthen the bonds of loyalty among members of the community (Corcoran & Wilson, 1986).

Schlechty (1985) suggests that superintendents and school board members must establish policies which foster the development of clear goals in each school building. The first step toward developing such policy is to have top-level decision makers carefully examine the image they hold of schools and the schooling enterprise. Three key questions system-level administrators must continuously ask themselves are:

- What is our school system about -- what are its binding goals and commitments?

- If we continue to do what we are now doing, what will our school system likely be about in 5 to 10 years?

- What should our school system be about? (p. 119)

Researchers provide a variety of suggestions for districts seeking solutions to these questions. Prominent among these suggestions are three tasks that are discussed in the following segments: specifying goals, establishing measurable results, and instituting effective monitoring practices.

Purkey and Smith (1985) state that the board of education and the superintendent should specify goals after getting input from school staffs -- the teachers union, parents, and community groups. The district leadership should also develop mechanisms (e.g., establishing a school improvement committee, providing release time for schoolwide staff planning) which facilitate the process of school improvement. Overall, the intent of district policy should be to facilitate the development of a school culture "that is conducive not only to student achievement but also to things such as staff collaboration and self-appraisal leading to 'staff-owned' innovations" (p. 376).

Schlechty recommends that the superintendent and school board members establish policies which encourage building administrators to translate their school goals into measurable results. Based on findings from the effective schools literature and writings of management theorists like Peter Drucker, Schlechty argues that "organizations using measurable outputs as a means of directing individuals and collective actions are more effective than organizations using other criteria for direction (such as the whims of administrators or the personal preferences of employees)" (p. 121). For example, allocations of time, monies, and personnel are measurable results which can be examined to gain a relatively clear image of the goals and priorities of a school or school system.

Other researchers suggest that boards of education and superintendents monitor secondary schools to insure that district goals are being met and to hold the staff accountable for the progress made in achieving school-level goals (Murphy, Mesa, & Hallinger, 1984; Peterson, Murphy & Hallinger, 1987; Purkey & Smith, 1985). Purkey and Smith contend that accountability is indispensable to a sustained and successful effective schools project because it convinces school staffs that top-level district administrators are serious and committed to the school improvement.

Most central office and secondary school administrators interviewed for this study agreed that district and school-level goals should "mesh." They differed on the approach for achieving such consistency, and, subsequently, offered many diverse suggestions. One district administrator, for example, recommended that the board of education and senior staff "frame goals and hand them down to the schools for goal development at their level," while

another indicated that the "central office and secondary schools must be mutually in agreement on what the goals should be and clear expectations should be set regarding the paramenters of the goals."

Other practitioners interviewed said that the central office should help secondary schools establish clear goals by providing support and technical assistance. One suggestion was to establish a data base (on all schools individually and collectively) to help schools identify their weaknesses. Another recommendation was to establish a secondary school liaison at the central office level who would provide guidance and technical assistance in all areas of secondary school improvement. Consistent with both of these viewpoints, one administrator responded that "the central office should serve as a facilitator by gathering information, establishing parameters, and collaborating with schools to address their needs as well as districtwide needs. The central office must set up a network for addressing common concerns...."

Practitioners also concurred that the central office should help secondary schools communicate their goals by sending clear messages about priorities through targeted staff development. One administrator suggested that the central office should require school improvement teams to display the district mission throughout the school and to keep goals in the forefront throughout various action-planning activities. Others stressed that the district should support the secondary schools by establishing liaisons to communicate the goals to various constituent groups and by providing financial resources to help underwrite the cost of written communications.

Those interviewed for this paper also perceived district monitoring and supervision as constructive feedback. They considered this process to be a useful way to help secondary schools focus their activities and resources on their goals.

This discussion of clear goals and core values intentionally avoids endorsing a specific approach for districts to follow. Instead, emphasis is placed on "what" should be done as opposed to being placed on the "how to." Schlechty (1985) presents the following argument that, in essence, best describes the district's role:

> The key...is that school boards and school executives must have a clear notion of what they expect students, teachers, principals, and others to do; they must communicate these expectations clearly, check to see if these things are done, provide corrective action and support where they are not being done, and then assess whether the doing of these things produces the end results that are intended. Frightening though it may be, school boards and top-level administrators are responsible for assuring that teachers et al. are expected to do the right things. Teachers and principals are <u>only</u> accountable for doing right the things they are expected to do. (pp. 121-122)

Leadership

Most studies of effective schools have targeted leadership as a major theme, and the principal as a key player in the instructional success of the school. According to these studies, leaders:

- are assertive; they set goals and provide direction to their staff. They have a vision of where the school is going based upon values which can be, and are, publicly articulated (Weber, 1971; Brookover et al., 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Austin, 1979; Venezsky & Winfield, 1979; Cohen & Manasse, 1982).

- provide for staff participation in the development of school policies and plans, the design and implementation of staff development, and other decisions affecting the work of the staff. They reward efforts of teachers to work together (California State Department of Education, 1980; Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Venesky & Winfield, 1979).

- understand organizational processes and are skillful at communicating with staff, group leadership, conflict resolution, and planning. They understand the processes of change and implementation and the need for continuity and stability (California Department of Education, 1980; Lipham, 1981; Yukl, 1981).

- maintain order in their buildings; they enforce rules fairly and consistently (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, [NIE], 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds & Fredericksen, 1979).

While there is great agreement that leadership is "an essential ingredient in any school improvement effort, there is less agreement in the behavior, styles, or skills required of educational reform leaders" (Purkey & Smith, 1985, p. 370).

Corcoran and Wilson (1986), in their studies of successful secondary schools, found this to be true also. While the principal was cited as a major factor in school success, they reported that leadership in the secondary schools tended to be dispersed with no one dominant leadership style. In addition, there was great variety in the ways these principals exerted their leadership. What these principals have in common is their ability to manage and work effectively with their diverse constituencies. In turn, they are trusted by these groups. These principals work to create the best conditions for students and faculty and encourage others to assume leadership roles. According to Corcoran and Wilson (1986), "At the heart of this is the ability of formal leaders in these schools to recognize the strengths of a diverse set of people and to allow those people to make maximum use of their skills" (p. 63). While strong leadership is critical, the principal is not the only source of it. Effective principals are those "who provide or cause others to provide strong leadership" (Schlechty, 1985, p. 124).

However, according to Cuban (1984), there are no "empirically-derived principal behaviors that produce the desired outcomes" (p. 145). What does a district organization do to support the development of this "faith and folk wisdom" (Cuban, 1984, p. 145) leadership in its secondary schools?

There appear to be at least four broad areas where districts can support leadership development in secondary schools. These include but are not limited to: (1) developing school site management, (2) principal involvement in hiring and placement, (3) monitoring and evaluating, and (4) training and development.

Returning to "faith and folk wisdom" again, school-site management is one vehicle for developing leadership at the building level (Cuban, 1984; Manasse, 1985; Purkey & Smith, 1985; Bacharach & Conley, 1986; Guthrie, 1986; Yin, Blank, & White, 1984). This type of management is based on the belief that the individual school is the primary decision making unit and the principal is the "chief executive officer" (Guthrie, 1986, p. 306) in the school. Under this approach, a principal and staff members plan school-based improvement activities, are provided a budget, and are held accountable for actions undertaken.

Selected secondary principals and central office staffs agreed. Indeed, one principal, when asked his perception as to what central office could do to assist secondary principals take more responsibility for their buildings and for school improvement, responded that the "central office should decentralize and assist with letting every captain of a ship chart his course." Similarly, a central office staff member whose primary responsibility is secondary education said, "give principals a wide range of authority to operate within their domain."

Another theme which emerges from the school-site management literature is that of teacher hiring and placement. A recent study conducted by Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger (1987), which explored the coordination, control, and assessment procedures used in effective school districts, reported that the secondary schools in their sample "gave their principals more flexibility over new teacher hiring than either elementary or unified districts" (p. 88). Guthrie (1986) agrees, feeling that not involving principals in hiring and assigning runs counter to principles of school-site management. He believes it is "impractical and unfair to hold a principal responsible for the effectiveness of a school if he or she has no control over who is assigned to teach in that school" (Guthrie, 1986, p. 309).

All of this additional responsibility on the building level, however, probably increases the monitoring role of the central office at the district level. According to Manasse (1985):

> ...districts need principal evaluation systems that are based on clearly articulated criteria and processes upon which principals and their supervisors agree. Performance of the instructional management role and measures of instructional effectiveness need to play an important part in this evaluation process. Such feedback systems can be another symbolic statement of district values. (p. 459)

This sentiment was echoed by principals and central office staffs interviewed for this paper. Several interviewees responded that central office supervision should include clear goals, clear criteria, and close monitoring. For those interviewees, it was hard to pin down what topics the supervision should cover, however. Peterson, Murphy, and Hallinger (1987) studied effective districts and found that the "supervision and evaluation of principals were closely tied to the stated objectives and curricular goals of the district" (p. 92). However, Cuban (1984) believes that conflict could emerge between building and central office administrators as principals are held more accountable for meeting district goals. It seems that while closer monitoring is appropriate, the content of that monitoring is not quite as clear.

The fourth area where districts can have an impact on school leadership is in principal training and development (Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987; Manasse, 1985; Sparks, 1986; Cuban, 1984). A wide range of training and staff development programs are suggested to address this issue.

Gordon Cawelti, in an interview with Dennis Sparks (1986), describes a set of leadership behaviors which he believes could drive administrator staff development. These include articulating the vision, developing the organization, fulfilling the instructional support role, and monitoring (p. 7). Manasse (1985) would agree, adding political skills as another behavior and noting that the principal center is a popular approach for meeting such principal inservice needs.

Another source available to central office staffs is the external consultant who offers short and long term staff development assistance. While short term (one-shot) workshops are often enjoyable and serve some purpose, more effective staff development for principals should relate to building and district goals and have an assistance and follow-up or coaching element.

Secondary principals want the central office to help them with their training and development needs. When asked about the district's role in this regard, secondary principals responded, "Tell us what is expected and provide workshops to help."

The concept of effective building leadership remains an elusive one. However, as central office staff consider their role in building leadership for secondary school improvement, they might consider applying school-site management by giving principals more discretion over budgeting and selecting and assigning teachers, jointly developing criteria for effectiveness, monitoring for accomplishment, and providing training and support for ongoing professional development.

Control and Discretion

There has been ongoing debate in the organizational effectiveness community to determine whether schools and districts are "bureaucratic" or "loosely coupled" organizations, or, as Mintzberg (1979) believes, "professional bureaucracies."

In a bureaucratic or tightly coupled school, the key to success would be maximum control by the management regarding all aspects of life in the school. The alternative point of view suggests that more decentralization and discretion will lead to greater effectiveness. The popular work of Peters and Waterman (1982) describes successful companies as having both "simultaneous loose-tight properties." Yin, Blank and White (1984, p. 14) speak in terms of having "flexible organizational structures, but rigidly shared values dealing with quality, service, motivation, and experimentation." Several educational researchers are also coming to that conclusion (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984; Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Rosenholtz, 1985). The study of successful secondary schools conducted by Corcoran and Wilson (1986) supports the same conclusion, that "...productive schools exhibit this pattern of control and discretion..." (p. 64).

Principals in these schools, according to Corcoran and Wilson (1986), exercise their control in three ways.

- They aggressively monitor the school's operation and keep their fingers on "the pulse of the organization" (p. 65).
- Control is maintained through careful management and articulation of the curriculum across subjects, grades, and schools.
- Supervision of the staff.

Teachers in these schools have a lot of autonomy in how they do their jobs, however, and teachers have a sense of control over their work lives. So, while controls are in place, teachers have flexibility in interpretation and implementation.

Successful schools seek to find a balance between control and discretion, knowing that too much control will reduce teacher initiative, (e.g., "just tell me where to put my feet,") and too much discretion can result in program fragmentation.

The debate can be carried over to the district level as well (Purkey & Smith, 1985; Cuban, 1984). Purkey and Smith believe that districts, in order to facilitate school improvement, should:

- determine guidelines that facilitate the process of school improvement and support conditions that promote taking responsibility at the school level
- make goals specific at the district level after receiving input from stakeholders
- hold school staff accountable for the design and implementation of improvement plans
- develop prescribed time lines.

While the superintendent and board are setting the direction and general content and process for school improvement, the specific content and process would be determined by the individual school. So, the direction and goals would be determined by the central office (which is control), while the implementation would be determined by the individual school (which is discretion).

There are some emerging alternative points of view, however. Researchers are beginning to discuss tighter central office controls to coordinate school management, curriculum, and instruction (Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987; Joyce, 1982).

According to Peterson, Murphy, and Hallinger (1987), tighter control from central offices is related to effectiveness. For instance, one of their key findings was:

> ...the presence of a preferred method of teaching in nine of the twelve districts (75%). Superintendents in these districts did not appear to accept the notion that instructional technologies are totally idiosyncratic, evanescent, and unspecifiable. Rather, it appears that these superintendents assumed that the central office could specify learning chains and particular teaching approaches. Not only did these superintendents support specific methods of teaching, which they believed increased outcomes, but they undertook efforts to ensure that these strategies were used by their teaching staffs.
> These strategies included communicating expectations that prescribed models were to be used and establishing a number of structures (goals and evaluation) and supports (staff development and budget allocations) to ensure that this occurred. (p. 90)

Corcoran and Wilson (1986) found that principals in successful secondary schools exercised control in three general areas: articulation, monitoring, and supervision. Peterson, Murphy, and Hallinger (1987) agree that tighter controls from central offices, in similar areas, were related to effectiveness.

This perspective is somewhat consistent with RBS' experience with selected districts in its region. Those districts seen as "improving" are districts where there is clear central office direction as to what will be taught and the instructional technologies that are to be used.

A group of secondary principals and central office staff members presented the following ideas on how to develop building-level "loose-tight" environments, and how the central office might contribute to that development.

- The central office should model it.
- This is a principal's task with no role for central office staff except to provide encouragement and support.

- Principals should be given responsibilities that require them to recognize staff skills.

No clear role was identified for the central office, but there seemed to be a lack of understanding of the concept of control/discretion. This suggests that a concept which several researchers consider to be important has not trickled down to district and school-level practitioners.

Historically, there has always been an implicit understanding between teachers and principals about not intruding on each others' domains (Joyce, 1982). The same can be said about schools and central offices. However, in today's pressurized atmosphere for implementing improvement efforts, central office staffs and building-level administrators are rethinking their roles in improvement processes and reassessing the areas that need to be "tight," or more controlling, and areas where discretion can be allowed.

Solving Problems and Improving Schools

The problems faced by the recognized secondary schools are not different from the problems confronting many secondary schools in America today. The most frequently mentioned obstacles cited in the Corcoran and Wilson (1986) study were:

- inadequate facilities
- declining enrollments
- inadequate funding
- poor school-community relations
- poor discipline
- lack of school spirit
- low attendance
- lack of clear academic standards
- drugs and alcohol
- complacency with past accomplishments.

While the problems confronting successful schools are not different from other schools, their approach to handling their problems is different. These schools choose to view their problems as opportunities and challenges, rather than constraints. Instead of blaming others or sitting back and waiting for someone else to take care of things, these schools aggressively seek alternative solutions. These are "can do" organizations (Corcoran & Wilson, 1986, p. 89).

It is particularly difficult to try to address this theme developmentally, for it is not a matter of policy but rather one of "tone and texture" (Schlechty, 1985, p. 126). The problem-solving orientation as described by Corcoran and Wilson seems to be closely related to other characteristics, especially leadership and climate. The "can do" attitude seems more a result of other conditions than something that can be developed discretely.

RBS staff members have had some interesting experiences here. In the secondary school improvement training called Joining Forces: A Team Approach to Secondary School Development, school-based improvement teams are encouraged to focus on problems and issues within their domain, in order to develop some of that "can do" attitude. Their success with this is usually related to the role the principal, an improvement team member, plays in the problem-solving process. If the principal encourages staff members to participate and be creative, and acknowledges their efforts, the improvement team is more likely to derive interesting ideas and approaches. On the other hand, if the principal does not demonstrate the "can do" attitude, the improvement team may not advance very far.

The problem-solving and improving orientation seems to be directly related to the management of the school and, as Schlechty (1985) believes, district management as well. Schlechty states, "What policymakers must keep in mind is that the norms and values which give high priority to disciplined problem solving and continuous improvement are substantially different from the norms appropriate to monitorization, standardization, and the maintenance and defense of the status quo" (p. 126). If districts want to encourage schools to be more involved with problem solving, they will need to change their style and the ways they interact with schools.

Some of the secondary principals and central office staffs who were asked how this "can do" attitude could be developed in school staffs thought the orientation was idiosyncratic. Other comments, indeed, referred to the management role.

- Give teachers the authority and responsibility to try different things.
- Train school improvement teams in problem solving.
- Provide opportunities that eliminate the fear of failure.

If central office staffs want to encourage problem solving attitudes and behaviors, they must recognize that improvement efforts can generate problems as well as resolve them. What schools need from central office staffs are assistance, encouragement, and support, not blame (Schlechty, 1985).

Moving toward school-based management -- with a focus on the school as the unit of change and with all the staff responsible for the teaching and learning that takes place -- may encourage that proactive "can do" approach discussed by Corcoran and Wilson (1986):

> These unusually successful secondary schools face up to their problems. They are truly 'can do' organizations that refused to succumb to readily available rationalizations for performance that is below expectations. They see problems as challenges to be overcome. Underlying this attitude is the support of their communities, particularly parents and board members who expect success but also give their schools staffs the discretion and resources necessary to achieve it. (p. 63)

Recognition and Rewards for Teaching

In his insightful sociological study, Lortie (1975) portrayed teaching as a profession which lacks recognition and rewards to motivate and sustain high levels of teacher performance. He observed that teaching is careerless with no stages of advancement and few possibilities for progression. The 20-year-old veteran, for instance, is indistinguishable from the neophyte, and the typical salary schedule features a gently rising income slope. Moreover, the teaching incentive system is largely insensitive to variations in talent and effort. The dedicated teacher receives the same salary, vacations, and other benefits as the drone who has retired on the job.

Experienced teachers seem to derive a substantial portion of their work satisfaction from intrinsic rewards linked to dealing with students and mastery of classroom processes (Blase, 1986; Lortie, 1975; Thompson, 1979). Such rewards fluctuate and are responsive to teacher effort. Reaching students and provoking their interest; having a good day or a good lesson; receiving thanks from students or former students; establishing and maintaining a well-disciplined, efficient classroom; these are some of the day-to-day gratifications of teaching. Yet teachers also testify to the difficulties of teaching, claiming that their work is not recognized or appreciated enough by those with and for whom they work (Corcoran & Wilson, 1986; Medved, 1982).

Data from the Corcoran and Wilson (1986) study revealed that teachers in successful secondary schools were not only frequently recognized as contributors to the school, but also were given more tangible awards (e.g., merit pay, stipends for professional development, promotions and higher rank or status such as team leader or curriculum coordinator) in appreciation for a job well done. According to these investigators, the net effect of recognition, when combined with other conditions that make up a positive work climate, is to increase "staff commitment to the institutions and their willingness to make that extra effort on behalf of their students" (p. 75).

The role of the central office in recognizing and rewarding teachers was a topic of concern for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) who, a few years ago, published a critical issues report (Brodinsky & Neill, 1982).

> ...some superintendents now openly acknowledge that responsibility for teacher morale and effectiveness lies at their own office doors. It is no longer fashionable to lay all the blame for poor teacher morale on the teachers alone.... The awkward truth...is that management ineffectiveness is---or was---one of the greatest causes of decline in teacher morale and effectiveness." (p. 9)

In order to boost teacher morale and effectiveness, some school boards and superintendents have adopted merit pay and/or differential staffing plans. In the simplest of terms, merit pay is "any device that adjusts salaries and provides compensation to reward higher levels of performance" (Ellis, 1984, p. 1). Differential staffing, on the other hand, depends on an organizational hierarchy or career ladder with vertical levels of responsibility and salary. Differential staffing differs from merit pay in that teaching levels involve increased duties, not merely higher pay for performing the same job better.

While few argue with the notion of rewarding outstanding performance or additional work, the leap from theory to practice has often provoked controversy. Research indicates that systems of merit pay and differential staffing tend to flounder on the issues of objective criteria for teacher effectiveness and the burdens of information gathering and record keeping (Doremus, 1982). Advocates argue, however, that reward systems can work if teachers are involved from start to finish, base salaries are adequate to begin with, incentives are large enough, and issues related to evaluation and selection are carefully considered (Cramer, 1983; Tursman, 1983).

Even though some previous efforts to enact pay incentives have been disappointing, the concept continues to appeal to many. For example, some practitioners interviewed for this paper recommended that the central office investigate merit pay, career ladders, mini-grants, or personal awards as a way of rewarding secondary school teachers for excellence. Others took a more traditional perspective and suggested that the district implement various types of recognition programs including receptions, letters of appreciation from the superintendent, publication of recognitions, and opportunities to serve on district committees. And still others expressed the opinion that the central office's role is primarily to support school-based incentive programs.

In sum, it is obvious that benefits can accrue from recognizing and rewarding outstanding teachers, yet the majority of American educators never have an opportunity to receive differential recognition based on performance. The role of the central office seems key to organizing and implementing an incentive system which permeates all levels of the organization. Merit pay and differential staffing are two programs worth further consideration even though they have not been without their critics.

High Expectations and Recognition of Achievement

Successful schools operate in a climate in which the professional staff believes that all students can learn. Researchers such as Berliner (1979),

Edmonds (1979), and Murnane (1980) found that teachers in effective schools tend to have higher expectations for student accomplishments than do other teachers. Similarly, Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, Ouston, and Smith (1979) reported that successful secondary schools produced a teacher expectation that all students would pass their exams.

Teacher expectations and evaluation of students' abilities are directly linked to achievement through differing amounts of instruction, time spent interacting with students, and quality of materials. Briefly stated, high expectations generate more and better instruction; low expectations produce less instruction and attention (e.g., Brophy & Good, 1970, 1974; Good, 1981, 1982; Kerman, 1979). In the end, students who perceive that teacher expectations are low too often believe they have no chance for academic success (Brookover, 1981) and, over time, these students make fewer efforts to gain the teacher's attention having withdrawn psychologically from the learning process (Rist, 1970).

In secondary schools selected for recognition, Corcoran and Wilson (1986) observed that dramatic shifts in academic expectations were often the initial step for turnaround schools on their road to excellence. One student captured the flavor of rising expectation when she told the site visitor: "Teachers are on you all the time to do better.... They just keep adjusting the goal upward" (p. 82). Raising expectations and increasing minimally acceptable achievement standards are two important means of enhancing learning opportunities for students.

Holding high expectations and increasing academic demands on students are frequently associated with schoolwide recognition of success. Schools that make a point of publicly honoring academic achievement and stressing its importance through the appropriate use of symbols, ceremonies, and the like encourage students to adopt similar norms and values (Brookover, et al., 1979; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1982, 1985).

Corcoran and Wilson (1986) noted numerous ways in which successful secondary schools recognized their students in order to promote higher levels of achievement. These included holding special assemblies to recognize outstanding students, establishing academic halls of fame, sending congratulatory letters and notes for all types of achievement, publishing and displaying student work, recognizing the "student-of-the-week," instituting the perfect attendance award, sponsoring a student recognition luncheon at a local restaurant, and printing the names of honor roll students on the school's sports programs.

Regarding the district level, authors of a research synthesis on effective school practices (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1984) concluded that effective districts create an environment in which high expectations for student achievement pervades the organization. As was true of teachers and principals at the building level, district leaders and staffs, "...believe that all students can learn and that the district educators have a large degree of influence over whether students succeed or not. Learning is seen as the most important purpose of schooling" (p. 12).

While no blueprint for implementing or maintaining high expectations exists, practical experience indicates that the superintendent exerts a critical role in creating a district climate favoring high expectations for students (Cuban, 1984; Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987). In 75 percent of the effective districts studied by Peterson, Murphy, and Hallinger, the superintendent required all teachers to employ an instructional model based in part on the research linking teacher expectations and student achievement. These superintendents also established structures and supports to ensure that these models were in place (p. 90).

Purkey and Smith (1985) suggest that top-down policies must be evaluated in light of their influence on the school and, ultimately, their effect on the school culture. These investigators argue that unlike some other school effectiveness characteristics (including schoolwide recognition of academic success), high teacher expectations cannot be quickly implemented by administrative fiat. Rather, high teacher expectations, which are a part of the school culture, can best be achieved by a policy balanced between incentives and mandates. Two examples of incentives controlled by the district are offering planning and implementation grants to schools and providing release time for program development.

The selected group of practitioners interviewed for this paper suggested that the district's role in establishing high expectations is to advocate a positive school climate and to provide information and resources to implement a school improvement model. One district staff member also suggested that the improvement model be built, in part, on district success stories.

Finally, practitioners expressed the opinion that the central office could play a significant role in rewarding and recognizing students for their achievements. Suggestions included establishing a district-level student recognition office, appointing student representatives to the board of education, and initiating a superintendent recognition award. Moreover, respondents thought that district administrators should encourage school staff members to recognize and reward the achievements of their students.

Student-Teacher Relationships

Working with students and seeing students learn and succeed is one of the most powerful forces that attract, maintain, and keep successful teachers in the classroom (Bredeson, Fruth, & Kasten, 1983). This sentiment is echoed in many research studies that have addressed the issue of student-teacher relationships (Haller, 1967; Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975; McArthur, 1978; Corcoran & Wilson, 1986; Blase, 1986).

These studies provide useful information about the benefits of encouraging student-teacher relationships. One study (Blase 1986) suggests that through the experience of engaging in basic relationships with students, teachers learn to appreciate their students more. According to the study:

- friendly interactions with students make everyone feel more comfortable and help smooth out the rough spots in the student-teacher relationships

- basic relationships with students keep teachers in touch with what's going on and helps them understand their kids better

- good student-teacher relationships provide the basic groundwork for developing appreciation, trust, and respect for the teacher as a person.

In essence, as teachers become more in touch with their students, their perspectives change. An awareness and understanding of their students' needs contributes to the growth of empathy. And, over time, teachers develop the attitudes and behaviors that enable them to meet students needs and derive a substantial portion of their work satisfaction from the intrinsic rewards linked to dealing with students as people (Blase, 1986).

While several studies shed light on the rewards teachers receive from working with students, and seeing students learn and succeed (Bredeson, Fruth, & Kasten, 1983; Brophy & Good, 1974; Corcoran & Wilson, 1986), limited research is available on the district's role in strengthening student-teacher relationships. However, conversations with school practitioners and information from recent secondary school studies (Corcoran & Wilson, 1986; Bredeson, Fruth, & Kasten, 1983) provided both formal and informal approaches for developing student-teacher relationships.

The most acknowledged example of formal support comes in the form of resources for extra-curricular programs. This, according to Corcoran and Wilson (1986), is where teachers and students have the greatest opportunities to work together to apply knowledge and achieve common goals. Practitioners agreed with this thinking. They believed districts should "provide resources for clubs in every discipline area." Academic clubs, debate teams, and choir activities should be financially supported as well as traditional athletic programs that currently dominate most extra-curricular budgets.

Scheduling is another formal approach that districts can address. One central office staffer suggested "building in periods during the day for student-teacher interactions." This is supported in the Corcoran and Wilson study (1986) which illustrated how one secondary school provided one-on-one instruction:

> During the eight-period day, English teachers are assigned only three classes. For the remainder of the day, English teachers meet with their students on a one-to-one basis to [discuss] the five to six major compositions required each semester. (p. 52)

Other formal approaches include providing reasonable workloads for teachers, sponsoring leader-advisor programs, and establishing adequate facilities where teachers can meet with individuals or small groups of students and thereby give them more personal attention.

Informally, the primary district role is one of support and encouragement. Using the "power of the position," district staff can exert their influence by developing favorable environments in which employees are encouraged to be internally motivated and to internalize the organization's major goals and functions (Bredeson, Fruth, & Kasten, 1983). In words spoken by one district administrator, "The central office should serve as a catalyst, not necessarily a director with specific systems/models, [but as] a facilitator" endorsing, supporting, and encouraging the building of strong student-teacher relationships in secondary schools.

School-Community Relations*

A school's relationship with its community reflects the seriousness that it attaches to keeping in touch with the many internal and external clients that it serves. Internal clients such as employees and students play a primary role in the teaching/learning process. And external clients like parents, who entrust their children to the schools for a major portion of their developmental years, the business community, that comprises the major employers within the community, and citizens, who support budget campaigns and bond issues, deserve regular communications and ongoing interactions with the schools.

School-community relations was recognized as an important function of the successful schools according to the Corcoran and Wilson (1986) study. These schools utilized a wide range of activities and techniques that built links to their communities. Corcoran and Wilson organized these activities into five areas that the participating schools addressed. They are:

- human resources -- recruiting citizens as volunteers for clerical duties, nurses assistants, classroom lecturers, tutors, and helpers for special projects and activities
- public relations -- using parents and community members to maintain an effective and honest two-way communication system
- financial resources -- acquiring funds from the community for athletics, merit and scholastic awards, equipment, and special projects
- community service -- sending school members out in the community to assist charitable organizations, provide services to local hospitals and nursing homes, and participate in community activities and making school facilities available for community meetings and social events

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*In their report of the Secondary School Recognition Program, Corcoran and Wilson (1986) entitled this theme, Working in the Community. In this discussion paper, the name School-Community Relations is used to capture the variety of issues inherent in a good school-community relations program.

- building an identity -- establishing and sustaining a positive relationship with the community in both symbolic and substantive ways (e.g., roadside school signs, school flags, alumni associations) and keeping local enthusiasm for the school alive.

These school-based activities call for a key person at the building level to serve as a school-community relations catalyst and coordinator. However, the central office should serve as the driving force behind effective school-community relations by providing schools with appropriate guidance, resources, monitoring, and support.

Models of district school-community relations plans (Bagin, Grazian, & Harrison, 1972; Kinder, 1982; Kovalcik, 1980; Dennis, 1983; Nugent, 1983; Buchanan, 1983) provide clear descriptions and guidelines for establishing district-level activities. For instance, one model calls for a school-community relations program that strengthens internal communications and relations, interfaces with the media, develops liaisons with the media, establishes a sense of rapport with students, involves the business community in the school system, and continually strives for two-way communication (Dennis, 1983).

A good example of a district-level school-community relations program is provided by one large urban school district that organizes its public relations efforts around four major functions: Employee Relations, Community Relations, Information Services, and Graphics (Kinder, 1982), as described below.

- Employee Relations -- an ombudsman program to help employees by brokering the system; Operation Involvement, a shared decision making program for district staff; monthly written feedback to employees on their questions; monthly rap sessions with the general superintendent; and regular interaction and consultation with employee organizations, governmental relations, and legislative services.

- Community Relations -- adopt-a-school program; a volunteer program; a citizen advocacy group for schools; community specialists who assist with desegregation efforts; a senior citizen action program; a community-supported effort involving parents in the learning process; a daily hotline service that helps citizens "broker" the district; business/education relations with the Chamber of Commerce; and special events like information weekend at 75 community sites and the hosting of thousands of visitors to the district.

- Information Services -- internal and external publications; news media relations; communication contacts at each school; a weekly Spanish radio program; special projects to increase attendance and eliminate social promotions; and other services such as audiovisual, layout, design, and editing.

- Graphics -- quality production and timely delivery of printed material to all departments in the district.

Secondary principals and central office staffs who shared their comments about the district's role agreed that these kinds of district activities provide the framework for building-level initiatives. They believed districts should develop community relations goals and support and monitor them, establish formal public relations offices to organize school activities, and maintain regular contacts with the community. In general, they concurred that the central office should provide the overall structure and the resources to implement effective school-level programs.

If districts are serious about developing and maintaining effective school-community relations with their clients, their top management must take primary responsibility for providing guidelines for school-community relations (Kinder, 1982). The main impetus must come from the superintendent in terms of policy development and district wide planning. Then, once the direction is set, schools can act with the benefit of the commitment, support, coordination, and technical assistance of central office staffs.

Good People and a Good Environment

The good people/good environment theme focuses on the many features that impact on a school's ability to attract quality people and provide challenging opportunities and environments. These features, which are interdependent and complicated, address issues related to people, relationships, ideology, goals, motivation, and structures (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1987). When viewed holistically, they become the conditions of the work place -- the reasons why good people stay in the teaching profession or, if these conditions are negative, the reasons why good people leave.

In their study of successful secondary schools, Corcoran and Wilson (1986) revealed some positive "factors" that enabled schools to attract and hold on to talented, hard working people. These factors included:

- a sense of belonging -- feeling part of an institution whose goals and values they shared
- respect -- a sense of dignity that comes from being regarded with deference and esteem by colleagues, students, and community members
- a sense of autonomy and control over one's own work -- having some freedom and flexibility to complete job tasks
- the opportunity for personal progress and growth -- working with stimulating people, attending inservice programs, pursuing advanced degrees, taking sabbaticals, serving on curriculum committees, and participating in other professional development activities
- the physical conditions of the building -- having a safe, secure, usable, and comfortable environment in which to work

- the ability to influence others -- having opportunities to discuss issues and provide significant input into all aspects of the school program

- recognition and rewards -- acknowledging staff efforts and contributions to the school.

These positive conditions touch on several critical issues and are a challenge for those districts seeking to create the appropriate environment for successful secondary schools. This challenge, although a difficult one, should not be ignored by districts because the working conditions that exist in many secondary schools have serious negative implications. In his discussion of the consequences of negative work place conditions, Schlechty (1985) points out that:

> Schools have for a very long time imposed upon teachers a set of working conditions that can only be described as demoralizing and debilitating.
>
> (As a result), ... too many excellent teachers do leave; many who might become excellent teachers if they had the appropriate environment for improvement and professional growth also leave, feeling themselves to be failures.
>
> But that is not all that happens. Some do not leave but adjust their behavior to the conditions surrounding them. They compromise (Sizer, 1984) or make a deal (Sykes, 1983). The net effect is less teaching and less learning or sometimes none of either. (p. 123)

Schlechty (1985) believes that districts have a role in creating the positive "conditions" that contribute to school excellence. He suggests that superintendents and board members direct their attention to:

> ...(1) policies which foster the development of clear goals in each school building, (2) policies which encourage faculties and building administrators to translate these goals into measurable results, (3) policies which encourage teachers and administrators to invest in each other and trust their own initiative and imagination as the most promising source of solutions to problems, (4) policies and programs which accept problems and conflict as a normal part of organizational life rather than a pathological condition to be avoided, and finally, (5) policies which foster a long-term developmental view without paralyzing the organization's ability to respond to the need for immediate action. (p. 119)

Murphy, Mesa and Hallinger (1984) provide similar prescriptions. They believe "school administrators and policy makers can foster excellence by taking steps to define academic and behavioral goals in terms of high expectations, develop and inculcate a consistent and coordinated strategy to reach the goals, and monitor and hold people accountable for progress made in achieving those goals." (p. 14)

Michael Fullan (1985) provides additional insight in his description of a strategy for implementing school change. His guidelines call for district leaders to:

> (1) develop a plan, (2) clarify and develop the role of the central office, (3) select innovations and schools, (3) clarify and develop the role of principals and the criteria for school-based processes, (5) stress staff development and technical assistance, (6) ensure information gathering and use, (7) plan for continuation and spread, and (8) review capacity for future change. (p. 405)

If districts are hoping to acquire good people and sustain good environments in secondary schools, they will have to make decisions that (1) address the conditions of the work place, and (2) address the district's role in secondary school improvement. While research on the district's role in secondary school improvement is scarce, there is an increasing amount of literature on school and classroom effectiveness, staff development, leadership, school organization, innovation implementation, and work place culture (Fullan, 1985; Purkey & Smith, 1985) that can guide district decision making in these two areas.

No quick fixes are available to address the issues identified in this theme. However, for districts that are willing to do something differently, opportunities do exist to bring about lasting improvements in secondary schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS

Most research suggests that the key to an effective school is a culture which encourages and promotes academic excellence. According to Corcoran and Wilson (1986), the culture of successful secondary schools is characterized by a set of norms, values, and roles which include, among other things, a working consensus about the purpose of education; high academic standards and expectations for success; a focus on the importance of people, their talents, and relationships; and a sense of pride in the school, its students, and staff. From their analysis, these authors concluded that the work norms accepted by the secondary school staffs and students and the general "ethos" that unites them into a caring community is probably more important to the success of the school than the specifics of school policies and practices (p. 99).

Many analysts of effective schools have concluded that research is promising, but warn that the school factors associated with success should not be viewed prescriptively. In fact, because of their cumulative nature, efforts to implement one or two of the variables would probably not have a significant impact on pupils' achievement. Similarly, attempts to integrate most or all of the factors into a school culture may not work in some schools and may be dysfunctional in others. Despite these caveats, reviewers also assert that the effective schools research has restored a sense of optimism about school success. It has helped to confirm some "faith and folk wisdom," and it has established some guidelines for policy makers and program designers attempting to create a learning environment conducive to academic achievement.

One shortcoming in the literature on high-performing schools is that researchers -- in their zealous attempt to learn about school-level factors -- tend to treat schools as if they exist in isolation from the district at large. However, common sense dictates that schools are not separate entities but, rather, are "nested" in school districts that set the context and define the boundaries for the school (Purkey & Smith, 1982, p. 64). In other words, the central office forms the superordinate environment within which the school must function.

While evidence suggests that school-based improvement needs district support in order to succeed (David & Peterson, 1984; Fullan, 1982), the district's role in assisting secondary schools to achieve academic excellence is less clear. The challenge for policy makers is to determine what to regulate, mandate, or control and what to leave to the discretion of those at the school level.

A partial answer to the control/discretion question lies in the nature of the school-level organization itself. Top district administrators interested in turning an academically inferior school into a successful one must aim at manipulating a host of characteristics which influence the school culture. The means for achieving such a goal requires intense school-level involvement, a sense of shared responsibility, and enough leeway to

make the necessary adaptations required by the school's environment and clientele. It is for these reasons that the school has often been identified as the unit of change and the central office as the initiator or stimulus to change.

While district mandates alone will likely be insufficient to encourage the development of a productive school culture, the school board and other district leaders should consider developing policies in the areas of goal setting, leadership through school-site management, teacher incentives and student rewards, and school-community relations. Then, after policies and clear guidelines are established, central office staffs should assist with implementation and continuation by assuming roles as nuturers, supporters, and monitors of school-level initiatives.

The following discussions in this conclusion begin with general policy proposals for goal setting, leadership through school-site management, teacher incentives and student rewards, and school-community relations. Concluding statements provide additional suggestions for addressing attitudes and behaviors that promote and sustain lasting change.

Goal Setting

Districts interested in creating and maintaining successful secondary schools should begin with the development of policies that foster clear goals at the building level. Without clear goals, it is difficult to determine how to allocate scarce resources and how to evaluate educational outcomes.

In developing clear goals, district leadership should be sure that:

- district goals address the priorities and resources needed for successful implementation
- district goals reflect high expectations and standards for achievement
- district goals are translated into measurable results that can be managed and monitored at all levels
- district goals support collaborative planning at the building level
- district goals are systematically and continuously communicated to staffs, students, parents, and community members.

Leadership Through School-Site Management

A natural outgrowth of the belief that a school is the ultimate policy target and the primary focus of change is the understanding that sustained school change cannot occur without the involvement and commitment of building-level staffs.

Garnering the collective support and resources of school staffs is not an easy feat. Achieving success in that regard is related, it seems, to providing opportunities to grow, allowing for flexibility, delegating authority, and demanding collective responsibility. This empowering of school staffs suggests that they be given the authority and responsibility to achieve educational success. For districts this means:

- identifying and preparing good people to become principals who can be the "chief executive officers" of their buildings
- giving principals more input into the hiring and transferring of school employees
- giving principals more discretion over school budgets and holding them accountable for the allocation of resources within their schools
- endorsing the use of school coordinating councils that, as a representative group of school clients, share in the responsibility of leading school planning and implementation activities
- furnishing school people with appropriate training in the critical areas that support district and school goals
- collaborating with school staffs to develop criteria for assessing effectiveness and to monitor for results
- holding school staffs accountable for activities over which they have direct authority and responsibility
- evaluating progress to identify strengths and weaknesses, determine positive and negative consequences, and generate areas for future development.

Teacher Incentives and Student Recognition

One of the primary roles of boards of education and central office administrators is to motivate secondary school teachers to maintain or improve high standards of performance. This statement is generally accepted by districts. However, the debate begins to rage when discussions are held about the best incentive system for teachers. Merit pay, differential staffing, across-the-board pay raises, and non-monetary incentives are all examples of workable teacher recognition programs. But, like any other program, their success or failure depends upon careful study, planning, and implementation. In essence, districts considering teacher incentive programs should:

- assess local needs and determine the goals for a tailor-made teacher incentive program

- solicit input from teachers and administrators to acquire the support and acceptance needed from those who are directly affected

- research thoroughly a variety of incentive programs to determine the glitches encountered by other districts

- develop a well-defined comprehensive plan that includes adequate funding, fair teacher evaluation, and competent administration

- evaluate the incentive plan regularly so that problems can be rectified.

Similarly, district leaders should publicly honor student achievement. Rewards and recognition should come in many forms including district-level honor rolls, honor societies, letters of recognition, trophies, recognition ceremonies, luncheons, and stipends. By stressing the importance of academic achievement through the use of appropriate symbols and ceremonies, district leaders can motivate students to strive for academic success.

A policy of recognizing and rewarding students at the district level means:

- honoring students in the district for academic excellence

- appointing students to serve on various decision-making bodies, including the board of education

- in large districts, establishing a district-level student recognition office or appointing one person to coordinate student recognition efforts

- requiring secondary schools to establish student recognition programs consistent with their school goals.

School-Community Relations

Promoting district policies that give the public information about and access to secondary schools helps develop a shared sense of vision for the school. A primary function of district leaders, then, is to establish policies which facilitate secondary schools reaching out to the community and which encourage the community to interact with the schools. These policies, which translate into practice at the building levels, should:

- promote public understanding and support thorough two-way communications between the schools and the community

- encourage active participation of citizens in planning for public school excellence

- promote liaisons with governments, businesses and industries, and colleges and universities to enhance student development and learning

- support meaningful parent involvement to strengthen home-school relations.

The preceding considerations are primarily for policy makers contemplating actions to support secondary school change. Policy development is proposed as an approach to consider because initiatives for goal setting, leadership through school-site management, teacher incentives and student recognition, and school-community relations can be undertaken more expediently when they are driven by policy that clearly establishes district intentions.

Conversely, other critical issues that are pertinent to the policy driven themes are less likely to be affected by district-level mandates. Attitudes and behaviors, for example, that create an atmosphere of trust, openness, and respect are essential whenever collaborative planning and shared decision making are the norms. Mandates won't necessarily generate the appropriate mindsets. But district leaders who recognize the importance of these essential aspects can model the proper behaviors that contribute to successful school change.

District administrators can help reshape attitudes by viewing school improvement as a cooperative endeavor and by striving to develop the tolerance and patience required for academic excellence. Specifically, they can encourage mutual commitments by developing and sustaining two-way communications; supporting shared decision making; and devoting adequate resources of time, money, and people to secondary school improvements. In general, they can establish an effective district-level environment that complements school-level developments and exemplifies a shared vision for secondary education.

By joining forces, district leaders and secondary school staffs can establish mutually acceptable ground rules. In addition to acquiring a clear understanding of widely proclaimed goals, participants at both levels can learn to appreciate each other's predicaments and better understand the potential barriers or constraints to secondary school change. In essence, they can form a partnership that balances top-down and bottom-up decision making and creates a solid working relationship focused on excellence in secondary schools.

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